INSA(6)

CLAIMS:

1.   Apparatus for generating billing data for subscribers in a telecommunications system, said apparatus comprising:

5   data storage means for holding subscriber records for a plurality of groups of subscribers, each of said groups comprising a plurality of subscribers for which a combined subscription is held, said groups comprising different numbers of subscribers; and

data processing means for analysing call data and applying one of a 10   number of different predetermined call charging tariffs to a call made by a subscriber in one of said groups, in dependence on the group of which the subscriber is a member, in order to generate charging data for said call.

2.   Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said storage means is for 15   holding billing account records, each of said groups being associated with a respective billing account, and said processing means is for generating a combined billing report for each said billing account.

3.   Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said processing means is 20   for relating a shared usage allocation to subscribers in one of said groups.

4.   Apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said shared usage allocation is an allocation of call time which may be used in part or in whole by any of the subscribers in the group.

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5.   Apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said processing means is for reducing said allocation of usage when said call data indicates that a subscriber in said group has made a call.

10   6.   Apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said processing means is for analysing said call data to determine whether said call falls within predetermined call type criteria, and for reducing said allocation of usage when those criteria are met, providing any of said allocation remains.

15   7.   Apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said processing means is for processing said call data to generate billing data indicating the total amount of said allocation of usage used by said subscribers in said group during a billing period.

8.   Apparatus for generating billing data for subscribers in a telecommunications system, said apparatus comprising:

data storage means for holding subscriber records for a plurality of groups of subscribers, each of said groups comprising a plurality of subscribers

5   and said groups comprising different numbers of subscribers; and

data processing means comprising means for relating respective usage allocations to each said group, each said allocation being shared by subscribers in the related group.

10   9.   Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said usage allocations are each allocations of call time which may be used by any of the respective subscribers in the related groups.

10.   Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said processing means is

15   for processing call data to reduce one of said usage allocations for a call made by any of the subscribers in the related group.

11.   Apparatus according to claim 10, wherein said processing means is for analysing said call data to determine whether said call falls within

predetermined call type criteria, and for reducing said usage allocation when those criteria are met, providing any of said allocation remains.

12.   Apparatus according to claim 10, wherein said processing means is for processing said call data to generate billing data indicating the total amount of the group's usage allocation actually used by subscribers in said group during a billing period.

13.   Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said usage allocations have varying magnitudes.

14.   Apparatus according to claim 13, wherein a plurality of group types are defined, different said magnitudes being allocated to different group types and the number of subscribers allowed in a group being dependent on the group type.

15.   Apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the number of subscribers allowed in a group generally increases with the magnitude of the group's usage allocation.

16. Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said telecommunications system is a mobile communications system.

17. Apparatus for generating billing data for subscribers in a mobile communications system, said apparatus comprising:

data storage means for storing subscriber records and usage allocation records, said usage allocation records being shared by respective groups of subscribers, each said group comprising a plurality of subscribers; and

data processing means for analysing call data and reducing the usage allocation in a usage allocation record when said call data indicates that a subscriber in a group sharing said usage allocation record has made a call in the mobile communications system, such that said usage allocation record indicates the amount of said usage allocation remaining after said call.

18. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the processing means reduces the usage allocation in the same resource allocation record when said call data indicates that a different subscriber in the same group has made a call in the mobile communications system.

19.   Apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the processing means attaches data indicating the amount of said reduction in usage allocation to the call data when the call data is processed.

5   20.   Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein said processing means identifies a usage allocation record associated with a subscriber by means of a subscriber identity number indicated by said call data.

21.   Apparatus according to claim 20, wherein said subscriber identity

10   number is a telephone directory number, such as an MSISDN.

22.   Apparatus for generating billing data for subscribers in a mobile communications system, said apparatus including data processing means comprising:

15   first means for associating a shared allocation of usage with a group consisting of a plurality of subscribers; and

second means for processing call data and for reducing said shared allocation when said call data indicates that a call has been made by any of said plurality of subscribers in the group.

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23. Apparatus according to claim 22, wherein said second means is for reducing said shared allocation only when said call data indicates that a call falling within predetermined call type criteria has been made.

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24. Apparatus for generating billing data for subscribers in a mobile communications system, said apparatus including processing means comprising:

first means for selecting a billing account;

second means for allocating a plurality of groups of subscribers to said selected account;

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third means for allocating a plurality of subscribers to each of said groups; and

fourth means for processing call data for each subscriber allocated to said billing account to generate said billing data for said account; said billing data including a total charge for said account and a total charge for each said group.

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25. Apparatus according to any preceding claim, further comprising means for printing billing reports using said billing data.

26. Apparatus, or a method, substantially as hereinbefore described, in particular with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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